



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

OPERATION COCAINE COWBOYS
CARTHAGE MAN SENTENCED FOR HIS ROLE
IN SOUTHERN MISSOURI DRUG RING

SPRINGFIELD, Mo. – Todd P. Graves, United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, announced that a Carthage, Mo., man was sentenced in federal court today in three separate cases arising from Operation Cocaine Cowboys, which charged a total of 36 federal defendants with illegal drug trafficking and firearms sales in southwest Missouri.

Julio Sanchez-Villagran, 28, an illegal alien from Mexico who was living at the Los Amigos Trailer Park in Carthage, was sentenced by U.S. District Judge Richard E. Dorr this morning to 15 years in federal prison without parole.

“**Sanchez-Villagran** was a significant player in the illegal drug trafficking and firearms sales investigated in Operation Cocaine Cowboys,” Graves said. “After his indictment, **Sanchez-Villagran** fled to Iowa, and continued selling methamphetamine in that state until he was arrested by officers with the Louisa County Sheriff’s Department.”

On Sept. 18, 2003, **Sanchez-Villagran** pleaded guilty to charges contained in three separate indictments resulting from Operation Cocaine Cowboys.

Sanchez-Villagran admitted that he was in possession with intent to distribute at least 50 grams of methamphetamine. Law enforcement officers found 359 grams of methamphetamine in **Sanchez-Villagran**’s apartment, Graves said, when he was arrested on Nov. 25, 2002. Graves explained that **Sanchez-Villagran** was sentenced to 10 years in federal prison without parole on that violation, to be served concurrently with the other narcotics violation sentences.

Sanchez-Villagran also admitted that he participated in a conspiracy to distribute 500 grams or more of cocaine. **Sanchez-Villagran** provided cocaine to others for resale as part of an agreement to distribute cocaine in Jasper and Lawrence counties in Missouri from November

1999 to Nov. 25, 2001, Graves said. He sold cocaine to undercover officers on at least three occasions. Graves explained that **Sanchez-Villagran** was sentenced to six years and six months in federal prison without parole on that violation, to be served concurrently with the other narcotics violation sentencing.

Sanchez-Villagran also admitted that he distributed methamphetamine and cocaine, and was in possession of a firearm in furtherance of the distribution of methamphetamine. **Sanchez-Villagran** sold a Magtech .22 caliber rifle and \$500 worth of methamphetamine to two undercover law enforcement officers in Carthage on Jan. 11, 2001, Graves said. On two separate occasions in January 2001, **Sanchez-Villagran** sold methamphetamine to undercover officers at the Los Amigo's Trailer Park as well as cocaine on one of those occasions. On Jan. 13, 2001, **Sanchez-Villagran** sold a Bryco Arms .22 caliber pistol, a Heritage Rough Rider .22 caliber revolver, and 50 rounds of Remington .22 caliber ammunition to two undercover law enforcement officers at the parking lot of the Joplin Flea Market, 216 E. 12th St., Joplin, Mo.

Graves explained that **Sanchez-Villagran** was sentenced to two years and nine months in federal prison without parole on each of those narcotics violations, to be served concurrently with the other narcotics violation sentencing – for an actual sentence of 10 years in federal prison without parole on all of the narcotics violations. **Sanchez-Villagran** was also sentenced to five years in federal prison without parole on the firearm violation, to be served consecutively with the narcotics violation sentencing – for a total sentence of 15 years in federal prison without parole.

These three cases are part of a series of federal indictments and federal criminal complaints filed in January and February 2002 as a result of a 27-month, multi-agency investigation into illegal drug trafficking and firearms sales.

Operation Cocaine Cowboys focused on an organization of individuals who were allegedly responsible for the delivery and distribution of multi-kilogram quantities of cocaine, methamphetamine, marijuana and other drugs from sources in California, Texas and Guatemala. As charged in a series of federal indictments and federal criminal complaints, Graves explained, 36 federal defendants allegedly distributed illegal narcotics, primarily in Jasper County, but also in at least four other Southwest Missouri counties (Christian, Greene, Lawrence and Webster) and elsewhere. Graves said that undercover officers made numerous purchases of illegal drugs and weapons as part of the investigation. In addition to the federal defendants, about 26 other individuals, including adults and juveniles, face a variety of state charges in related cases.

Of those 36 federal defendants, Graves said, 32 have been convicted and two remain fugitives. Charges against two defendants were dismissed in favor of state prosecution.

This case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Randall D. Eggert. Operation Cocaine Cowboys was investigated by officers from the Missouri State Highway Patrol and the Combined Ozarks Multijurisdictional Enforcement Team (COMET), in cooperation with numerous other law enforcement agencies, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, Jasper County

Drug Task Force, Mid-States Organized Crime Information Center (MOCIC), and the Carthage Police Department. Assistance to Operation Cocaine Cowboys was provided by Greene, Jasper and Stone counties' sheriff's departments, the Joplin, Springfield, Oronogo and Webb City police departments and the U.S. Marshal's Service.

This news release, as well as additional information about the office of the United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, is available on-line at

www.usdoj.gov/usao/mow